

10. LARGE CLUTCH OF NAKTA EGGS

K. S. Shivbhadrasinhji informed me that he had found a nest of a Nakta duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotus*) containing a large quantity of eggs on 21st August 1959 at his farm at Hathab, Gohilwad District, about 18 miles from Bhavnagar.

So on 25th August 1959 he and I went to see the nest. The nest-hole was in a bifurcated trunk of a mango tree. There were two mango trees close to each other, one of which contained the hollow in which the eggs were laid. The trees were situated in open grassland with clusters of other mango trees here and there. A small pond of dirty rain water, the only suitable pool in the neighbourhood, was 300 yards from the nest-hole. The nest-hole was 70 inches from the ground, the diameter of the entrance was 9 inches and the hollow $45\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. The bottom of the nest-hole was slightly wider, had a separate narrow exit leading upwards to a broken stump, the width at the base being 6 inches. The nest-hole was mostly lined with soft down mixed with sand debris and contained 54 (fifty-four) eggs. We consider this to be an unusually large number, perhaps a record for one nest, the product of at least three or more females. A. Anderson found a nest with 40 eggs, and Livesey in Kotah, Rajasthan, found one with 47 (Baker, NIDIFICATION 4: 490). The latter thought that it was the product of two or more females.

Taking into account other observations in the vicinity of the nest-hole within a week, we saw one male Nakta and four females, and one day the drake had with him five ducks. We made a search of the neighbouring trees for nests but could not find any and the one which contained the eggs appeared to us as the most suitable site for the Naktas. Therefore, a communal nesting appears to be the obvious answer when suitable nest-sites are wanting. Later, owing to human disturbance, we found the Naktas had deserted the nest and a few of the eggs were cracked and smelly.

DIL BAHAR,

BHAVNAGAR,

August 27, 1959.

R. S. DHARMAKUMARSINHJI

[This, as far as we know, is the largest number of eggs recorded in a single Nakta nest.—EDS.]